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ARTS AND CRAFTS.

THE primary motive of the arts and crafts movement is, as the name implies, the association of art and labor. Initially an English movement, it has been slowly emerging from the general industrial field for about forty years. . . . On its theoretical side the movement is, of course, much older than forty years, its development as an idea being measured by the lives of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris.¹

The chapters which make up the greater part of Mr. Triggs's volume give an excellent outline of the work of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris in relation to art and industry, followed by a sketch on Ashbee and the Reconstructed Workshop and another on Rookwood. The whole leads up to the practical efforts made in Chicago by the Industrial Art League, of which the author is secretary.

Little need be said here of the facile and engaging manner in which Mr. Triggs presents his plea for the work of regeneration in which the league is engaged, but it may not be out of place to speak of the economic bearing of such a movement as a departure in industrial aims and methods. The purpose is to humanize and beautify industry and to bring art into the everyday work of the industrial classes. This end is sought through a return to handicraft methods of work and an avoidance of competitive commercial methods of management. In the later phases of the propaganda machine production is not condemned without qualification, except in practice. Particularly is this true of Mr. Trigg's presentation of the case, although the earlier phases represented by Morris, and more especially by Ruskin, renounce the machine and all its works with an animation that is not to be mistaken. But even in the later phases of the movement the recognition of machine production as an unavoidable circumstance, if not indeed an unavoidable evil, is a perfunctory concession to facts rather than an integral element in the principles on which the advocates of the movement go about their work.

The movement, it must be said, runs on sentimental grounds rather than on grounds of reasoned practicability. Industrially it is not a continued growth out of the present, but seeks continuity with a past phase of economic life. This may be a necessity of the case. To find a basis for that "association of art and labor" at which the movement aims, such may perhaps be the only available recourse, and this is

¹ *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement.* By OSCAR LOVELL TRIGGS. Chicago, 1902. Published by the Bohemian Guild of the Industrial Art League.

scarcely the place to offer criticism on the artistic merits of such a course. But seen from the standpoint of industrial feasibility the whole matter looks somewhat different. Its striking trait in this respect is a certain "lack of contemporaneity." Modern industry, in so far as it is characteristically modern, means the machine process; but according to the arts-and-crafts apprehension, only outside the machine process is there salvation. Since the machine process is indispensable to modern culture, both on business grounds and for reasons of economy, this limits the immediate scope of the arts-and-crafts salvation to those higher levels of consumption where exigencies of business and economy are not decisive. The greater (90-99 per cent. of the whole) range of industry must under present circumstances of business and household management remain untouched by any such proposed alteration of the character of the industrial process. The "industrial art" methods are too costly for general business purposes, and the "industrial art" products are (in point of fact) too expensive for general consumption; indeed it is of the essence of industrial art products, if they are to pass inspection by the adepts, that they must be sufficiently expensive to preclude their use by the vulgar.

Culturally the movement is an offshoot of Romanticism, which means archaism, but always a sophisticated archaism. In the arts-and-crafts ritual the requisite sophistication is had by an insistence on genuineness, sincerity; which being interpreted in economic terms means a genuinely high labor cost. This requirement, of course, boldly traverses the requirements of modern business enterprise as well as of modern, that is to say democratic, culture. Business exigencies demand spurious goods, in the sense that the goods must cost less than they appear to; while a democratic culture requires low cost and a large, thoroughly standardized output of goods.

If the proposed association of art and labor is to go into effect under modern circumstances, it will have to mean the association of art with the machine process and with the technology of that process. Modern industry is machine industry, and the forms of labor for which there is an outlook under modern circumstances are those employments which are engaged in the machine industry. Such labor as is not associated with the machine process and conditioned by its technological requirements is in the position of an inconsequential interloper. Such work as goes on today without being immediately under the guidance of the mechanical technology, is, with sporadic exceptions, subsidiary to that main body of work which this technology directly

and unquestioningly controls. And the precarious margin of work still left outside the sweep of a rigorously consistent machine technology grows visibly narrower from day to day. Therefore, any movement for the reform of industrial art or for the inculcation of æsthetic ideals must fall into line with the technological exigencies of the machine process, unless it choose to hang as an anæmic fad upon the fringe of modern industry.

Men's, particularly workmen's, habits of thought in industrial matters are machine made, in a progressively more unmitigated degree; and if these habits of thought are to be shaped by any propaganda of ideals, they must be sought out and laid hold on in the field where they grow. The machine process has come, not so much to stay merely, but to go forward and root out of the workmen's scheme of thought whatever elements are alien to its own technological requirements and discipline. It ubiquitously and unremittingly disciplines the workman into its way of doing, and therefore into its way of apprehending and appreciating things. "Industrial art," therefore, which does not work through and in the spirit of the machine technology is, at the best, an exotic. It will not grow into a dandelion-like "weed of cultivation," for it has no chance of life beyond the hothouse shelter of decadent æstheticism.

But however impracticable, within the frontiers of a democratic culture, may be the (substantially aristocratic) ideals and proposals of the "Dreamer of dreams, born out of his due time," it does not follow from all this that the movement initiated by the Dreamer need be without salutary effect upon the working life of the workmen or the artistic value of their output of goods. Indirectly these ideals, romantic or otherwise, have already had a large effect, and there is every reason to hope that the propaganda of taste carried on by organizations like the Industrial Art League and its congeners will count for much in checking the current ugliness of the apparatus of life.

At its inception the movement was a romanticism, with a smear of lackadaisical æstheticism across its face. But that was not its whole meaning, nor is it the more enduring trait. Archaism and sophistication came of a revulsion against the besetting ugliness of what was present before the eyes of the leaders. The absolute dearth of beauty in the philistine present forced them to hark back to the past. The enduring characteristic is rather an insistence on sensuous beauty of line and color and on visible serviceability in all objects which it touches. And these results can be attained in fuller measure

through the technological expedients of which the machine process disposes than by any means within the reach of the industry of a past age.

Now, the particular line of arts and crafts endeavor for which Mr. Triggs speaks, the Industrial Art League, recognizes the force of this historical necessity more freely than the arts and crafts adepts of the stricter observance. Indeed, this aspiration after contemporaneity on the part of Mr. Triggs and his following is something of a stone of offense to the faithful, this apparently being the substantial reason why the Chicago Society of Arts and Crafts is not on speaking terms with the Industrial Art League. What has been said above, therefore, of the precarious outlook for industrial art under the régime of the machine process applies with less breadth to Mr. Triggs's line of endeavor than to many others.

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